

Living **Faith**

LENT

Creative
Communications
Sample

DAILY CATHOLIC DEVOTIONS

Revealing Our Hearts

*Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning.* JOEL 2:12

We begin the Lenten season with what feels like two contradictory readings. The Old Testament urges us to declare a fast, quit our chambers and sound a trumpet in the streets, while the New Testament reading (today's gospel) urges us to go to our rooms and pray in secret.

The conversion of our whole hearts means giving a time of serious consideration to both our public and our private selves. Often, the divisions between the two can reveal the source of our sorrowful separation from the heart of Christ. The things we hide from the public eye are often the tendencies, events and actions that are internal sources of shame, fear and guilt—the sins we are tempted to withhold from Christ's saving mercy.

During this season of Lent, let's reveal our hearts, whole and entire, to God's loving eye.

~ ELIZABETH DUFFY

Choosing Wisely

What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself? LUKE 9:25

Our life is a pure gift from a gracious God. But once the gift is given, God wants us to participate in the plan that he has for our lives. We are partners with God as we strive to form a meaningful life based on love of God and on loving service to others. God is the senior partner, of course. God gives us the wisdom and guidance to make the right choices that can lead to our peace and happiness. “Choices” is the key word. We are never forced to do anything. God asks us to freely choose an active, fruitful loving relationship with him and with all of creation. If we fail to choose well, we’re not responding to God’s continual love. Our life loses its meaning. Gaining the whole world could never make up for that! However, if we have chosen well, let’s give thanks to God, who never stopped helping us with divine guidance along our way.

Lord, may I understand the significance of my choices.

~ FR. KENNETH E. GRABNER, C.S.C.

Ongoing Transformation

*This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
 releasing those bound unjustly,
 untying the thongs of the yoke;
 Setting free the oppressed,
 breaking every yoke;
 Sharing your bread with the hungry,
 sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
 Clothing the naked when you see them,
 and not turning your back on your own.* ISAIAH 58:6-7

Lent is a season of recognizable external piety, displays of “holiness” and personal sanctity—we wear ashes on our foreheads, skip meals, engage in extra devotions like the Way of the Cross. The end of it all, though, should be a shift in gaze from the self to the other, from private prayer, introspection and self-examination to the service of God in our communities. Our “thoughts and prayers” are powerful, but God beckons us to further action. Instead of looking at Lent as an extended self-help project, I pray now for real transformation. Let it begin with me, yes. But let it not end there.

~ JESSICA MESMAN GRIFFITH

The Gift of a Lifetime

*“Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you,
“Restorer of ruined homesteads.”* ISAIAH 58:12

This passage explains that if we can manage to rid ourselves of oppression, false accusations and malicious speech, and if we can give our bread to the hungry, then good things await.

The Lord says if we do these things, he will remove our gloom, guide us, strengthen us and bless us with abundance. He promises to raise ancient foundations and rebuild ruins for our sake. He is offering us a complete renovation in exchange for us minding our tongues and being generous and compassionate.

What I really love is this last part. It's not just about what we will get, but also about what we will be able to give. When the Lord blesses us in these ways, we become a blessing to others. Imagine being able to be a “repairer of the breach” or a “restorer of ruined homesteads.” This means that after we are repaired and restored, we can help others heal their brokenness. This is perhaps the finest gift, and the highest honor, of a lifetime.

~ KRISTIN ARMSTRONG

Dealing With Temptation

*You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him alone shall you serve.* LUKE 4:8

Three of the four gospel writers tell the story of Jesus' temptations in the desert after his 40-day fast. The evangelists believed that the example of Jesus would encourage the early Christians in their struggles with temptation. Satan tempts Jesus in a number of ways. Satan starts with Jesus' bodily hunger and encourages him to work a miracle for himself so that he may eat. Jesus says: "One does not live by bread alone" (verse 4).

Satan also tempts Jesus to save the world by doing something spectacular and throwing himself off the temple and letting his angels protect him. But Jesus knew, as do we, that we only need to center ourselves in prayer and see our problems in light of God's word in Scripture.

At the beginning of this Lent, we commit ourselves once again to the basic spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, abstaining from what only distracts us, attending weekday Mass or some other Lenten devotion. That will make for a spiritually fruitful Lent.

~ FR. MARTIN PABLE, O.F.M. CAP.

Lending Hands and Hearts

Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me. MATTHEW 25:45

Who are the least ones in your life? Maybe you think of the faces we see in fundraising requests for diocesan programs and other social services. Or maybe you think of people like the gentleman who stands with a cane outside the subway stop each evening, or the fellow who asks for spare change outside the grocery store.

Yes, those strangers and semi-strangers are in need. But so are a lot of folks we know—the man who suffered a severe concussion and can't drive himself to Mass anymore. The new widow who would love an invitation to dinner to chat about anything besides wills and estates. The coworker who is struggling with a new process but is too afraid or too proud to ask for help. Let's resolve this Lent to open ourselves to all of the "least ones."

Lord, may I reflect your goodness to everyone I encounter today.

~ MELANIE RIGNEY

Faith With a Purpose

*So shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth:
It shall not return to me void,
but shall do my will,
achieving the end for which I sent it. ISAIAH 55:11*

It would be foolish pride to think that we could completely grasp God's purpose in gifting us with Scripture since we will never know, in this lifetime, the "end" for which God sent us the word. However, with faith and confidence in a loving God, we are meant to discern what the Word of God means to us in our lives. We are also meant to play our part.

We gain a taste of the purpose "for which" God sent his word simply by doing what we are doing—reading Scripture, reflecting on it and putting it into action, living the word in our everyday lives. That's how we participate in the word's end being achieved. Can we participate with confidence, even while we don't know what the end purpose will be? That requires a healthy dose of faith. We'll still need to work on that. But that's what Lent is all about!

Author of Life, help me to do your will and further your purpose.

~ TERENCE HEGARTY

A Heart Workout

*A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.* PSALM 51:12

We are in the first week of Lent—lots of time to make this holy season meaningful. It's a great time to look at where you've been and where you want to go. How better to achieve this goal than by doing some "heart" work. The psalmist asks God to create in him a "clean" heart, to renew the spirit within him. Lent can be like taking your heart on a spiritual workout. We need this time to examine where we have gone wrong and how we can change for the better. During Lent, the Church asks us to follow a simple three-step plan to make the cleansing happen: prayer, fasting and remembering our commitment to the poor and marginalized (almsgiving). Follow that plan and you will renew your faith. It will enliven your spiritual life. Give "the plan" a chance.

— PAUL PENNICK

The Fullness of Emptiness

[She] told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." JOHN 20:2

Emptiness is often associated with nothingness, frustration or meaninglessness. But the emptiness in today's gospel is a different kind. The tomb is empty—except for a few neatly folded burial cloths. This emptiness is filled with meaning, wonder, life, love, joy, mystery and hope. The tomb is empty! Jesus is not dead! He is risen! This incredible event is not merely something that happened 2,000 years ago. It is happening right now—in our time and place. For over 2,000 years, Christians have celebrated Easter. In the empty tomb lies the fullness of our faith.

Risen Jesus, help me to celebrate Easter by my love, hope, generosity and tenderness.

SR. MELANNIE SVOBODA, S.N.D.

ACTS 10:34, 37-43 • PSALM 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
COL 3:1-4 OR 1 COR 5:6-8 • JOHN 20:1-9 OR LUKE 24:1-12

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible with Revised New Testament* © 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC, and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All rights reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Living Faith: Lent. Design by Jeff McCall. Cover image: iStock.com/belchonock. © 2019 Creative Communications for the Parish, a division of Bayard, Inc., 1564 Fencorp Dr., Fenton, MO 63026. 800-325-9414. www.creativecommunications.com. All rights reserved.